

THIRTY-FIFTH
ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
MINISTRY-AT-LARGE

IN LOWELL, MASS.

READ FEBRUARY 15, 1880.

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PRESS OF MARDEN & ROWELL.
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REPORT.

*To the Officers and Members of the
Ministry-at-Large in Lowell:—*

ORIGIN OF THE MINISTRY-AT-LARGE.

The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them.—MATT. xi:5.

Some thirty-seven years ago a Society was organized in this city, called the "Unitarian Lowell Missionary Society," designed especially to advance the interests of the faith it represented in the West. In a little more than a year it dropped its denominational name and purpose, and turned its attention from the West to the need of a ministry nearer home, to extend the Gospel, "without money and without price," to a large class then being attracted to the city by the opportunities for work offered by the mills, who, for different reasons, failed to become connected with any of the existing

churches. And in September, 1844, the "Lowell Missionary Society" established a Ministry-at-Large in Lowell similar to one already existing in Boston.

This ministry was not to be essentially different from the ordinary ministry of the Gospel, except that it was to be offered, in the true spirit of its founder, free of charge to those who chose to avail themselves of it, and that it was to be free from all denominational or sectarian requirements. It was to be simply Christian,—nothing more, nothing less.

But a ministry going out thus in all directions to the unchurched was necessarily brought into contact with a great deal of poverty, and not infrequently clothing had to be supplied before the family designed to be benefited could attend the worship of the chapel. Hence the administration of charity became almost from the very first, a part of the work of the Ministry-at-Large; and as that which ministers to the senses receives most attention, it soon came to be known chiefly as a *charitable* institution, whose primary office it was to seek out and aid such worthy poor as might be brought to its notice. At first, the aid it rendered was trifling,—the first year expending in cash but \$134, and the second year \$191. Year by year this amount increased, as the city grew and the means of the Society became more ample, until three years ago, when we expended \$3,482.96, the largest amount expended in any one year. Several charitable bequests have been made, the income of which is disbursed through the agency of this Society, and a house of worship has been bought and paid for. And

yet, through all these years, the Society has had no legal existence, and was therefore incapable of owning its house or holding a dollar of money, except by common consent. The different legacies, the income of which we have referred to, are held in trust by five different boards of trustees, and the house is in the hands of still another, making a very complex machinery for the operation of its affairs, and adding no little to the clerical labors of the minister in charge.

As the operations of the ministry became more extensive, the inconvenience of this system began to be seriously felt, (and more especially, the inconvenience of being unable to receive bequests), and through the active efforts of Julian Abbott, Esq., measures were instituted for the incorporation of the Society under the laws of the State, and in July of the present year, the Lowell Missionary Society surrendered to its offspring and legitimate heir, the Ministry-at-Large in Lowell, under which title it is now prepared and willing to receive all the legacies, gifts, donations, and benefits its many friends are anxiously waiting to bestow upon it. In law we are a new Society. In fact we are the same that we have been for thirty-six years, except that we have grown a little larger and have "a new name" written upon our forehead.

THE WORK OF THE YEAR

Stated in figures is briefly told. In the relief department we have received 2,472 applications for help, of which 467 were refused and 2,005 granted.

As to nationality and parentage our record shows 1,032 Americans, 620 Irish, 422 English, 190 French, 162 Scotch, 46 other nationalities. We expended in charity \$2,513.09, distributed 1,130 garments, 88 yards of cotton flannel, and treated, through the kindness of Dr. M. G. Parker, 67 cases of ear, eye, and throat diseases, requiring 388 applications. Other cases of office treatment have been referred to the City Dispensary, established during the year, and cases requiring treatment at their homes have been attended free of charge by Dr. J. H. Gilman, of the Lowell Dispensary, and Dr. C. A. Viles, to whom our grateful acknowledgments are due.

The number of applications received was 590 less than that of the previous year, and 1,070 less than that received in 1876, being a gain of 43 per cent. in three years, and of nearly 24 per cent. in one year. It is due to the credit of humanity to note that for the most part, on the revival of business, those who could do so, went quietly to work to earn their own bread. It is certainly gratifying to find that while too much giving lets down manhood and relaxes effort on the part of the receiver, the majority of those asking alms in times of depression such as we have just experienced, prefer after all to *work* and earn their living when they can.

Our Sunday School has entered upon its roll during the year the names of 273 scholars and 18 teachers, and maintained a larger average than usual through the year; the Church has added nine to its list and dropped three, and has a membership of 58.

The Temperance organization under our charge enrolls 129, mostly young men and women ; and the Sewing School 132 little girls.

THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL WORK OF THE MINISTRY-AT-LARGE.

Hitherto, we have considered in our reports the Ministry-at-Large chiefly in its relation to charity, as its most prominent and striking feature. But it has a moral and religious side which deserves some notice. Originally, we have said, it was the purpose of this ministry "to preach the Gospel to the poor" and to administer to the moral and religious necessities of those who neglect to associate themselves with the different churches in the city. We find a very considerable class of persons in every large town or city, and especially in a manufacturing town where there is always more or less of a floating population, who seldom if ever attend church, but who will go to a meeting held in a public hall, and sometimes to an evening service in a vestry. This is frequently observed in the effort to organize a new society. So long as they worship in a hall the attendance is most encouraging ; but when they move into a new church, they leave one-half or two-thirds of their congregation behind.

This arises from different causes, one of which is a dislike to assume the responsibilities of a member of an organized society, but more frequently from an inability to pay the high pew rents, and to dress as others do in a fashionable church. It does not matter

that there are free sittings in the church. No one wants to occupy a free seat where others pay, except it be transiently. It is not the free seat that troubles him, but the consciousness of a discrimination between himself and others, and the feeling of isolation and degradation which it brings with it. A poor man, poorly clad, cannot feel quite at home in a wealthy church, in which is seen every Sunday morning the evidence of refinement and luxury, no matter how kindly he may be received. The best meant kindness may only serve to create a sense of obligation which he feels unable to discharge, and so avoids. But in a public hall it is different. There all meet upon a level. The church partakes of the nature of private property. The pew belongs to the man who owns it. The hall belongs to the public. The sittings are alike free to all.

Then again, the preacher is not quite the same on the platform that he is in the pulpit. He catches the spirit of the place, breathes easier, speaks with a larger freedom, and assumes altogether a more democratic style suited to a popular audience. "The common people" tire of dry doctrinal discussions, of philosophical treatises, and of extended homilies. But it is a mistake to suppose therefore that they are satisfied with poor preaching; for they are not. They want plain and simple utterances which go straight to the mark, but these must be full of sound sense and practical information. And we know of no place where a little hard study, if it be practical, shows itself to better advantage than in a society

embracing the common people. It has been a matter of surprise to us to see with what eager readiness they seize on to the fragments of information we are able to bring them from time to time, and profit by them; and it is a source of regret to us that we are so often obliged to neglect these higher claims in order to minister to the physical needs of so many beyond the reach of our moral and spiritual help. Of all societies, a ministry-at-large needs most an earnest, energetic, well-informed minister. And it needs, also, all of his time and strength. What he gives to the disbursement of charity must be drawn from the intellectual wants of his people.

"The common people" are a social people, warm hearted and earnest, and are not only easily influenced by personal contact, but are wonderfully dependent on the personality of their spiritual teacher for their moral and spiritual life and growth. If we were asked what was the most essential qualification in a minister to the poor, we should say, a personality which could throw itself into the very souls of those to whom he was called to minister. If we were asked what was the greatest force of Christianity, we should answer, *the personality* of Jesus.

The common people do not require little of their minister, but much. He must be a library to them, for they have few books and little time for reading: a many-sided man capable of instructing them in almost everything that comes up. He stands in respect to the minister of a wealthy parish much as a principal of an academy or a professor in a frontier college

stands to the president of a well-endowed university. In the latter, a professor is appointed for each branch of instruction. In the former, one or two instructors must do the whole work. In a wealthy parish, they have no need of a minister to tell them of law or medicine, or how to transact business, for they learn that elsewhere. They employ him as an instructor in theology and religion. But the poor people must come to their minister for all these things.

THE HINDRANCES TO THE SPIRITUAL WORK.

It was to meet these wants that the Ministry-at-Large was originally organized. It was hoped that by opening a place of worship alike free to all, it would be filled as a public hall is filled with transient and permanent worshippers. But it must be confessed that it has not thus far accomplished all that its friends hoped in this direction. The congregations in these chapels have never been very large, and to secure even a fair attendance has always been felt to be very difficult. And the question arises: Why is it? Where is the weak spot, or the friction that impedes its free and easy movement, and causes this grating, grating, that we have always felt, which stops our machinery or makes it go so hard?

It may be partly in the minister himself. It is hardly for us to say. We have already indicated that the demands are not few nor light. Perhaps the particular "gift" needed cannot always be had for the money at hand. Yet, there have been, and there are men of marked ability in this ministry, and the

most brilliant of them all complains that "a parish of five hundred families is required to ensure even a fair audience"; whereas it was supposed that an audience could be gathered at almost any time from the transient multitude surging hither and thither through our cities, and having no fixed abode anywhere.

There are other reasons, therefore, to account for the partial success which has attended our efforts, one of which is the hard and exhausting labor endured by so many through the week, which inclines them to as little effort as possible on Sunday. It is their day of rest and they take it. But even here we observe that the poorest laborers among us, the Roman Catholics, do not neglect their church because they are tired or need to attend to the chores at home. But the chief cause, and one sufficient of itself to account for the indifference complained of, is this: *The connection of the ministry of religion with the administration of charity.* Dr. Chalmers, I think it was, said long ago, "that a process for Christianizing the people was sure to be tainted and enfeebled where there is allied with it a process for feeding the people"; and the experience of the Ministry-at-Large and of city missions, we think, corroborates the truth of this statement. The special thought the writer had in mind was doubtless the corrupting of religious principles with motives of worldly gain, illustrated in a story told by Bishop Potter in a paper on this subject, where a party being asked "How do you get along this hard winter?" replied, "Oh, varry poorly, there will soon be nothing left for us but to go to

mornin' prayers." Those who attended morning prayers at a certain place were entitled to a prescribed amount of aid. But the greatest difficulty does not lie in this direction, but quite the opposite. The poor are singularly sensitive on the subject of their poverty, —unnecessarily so, we sometimes think,— but the fact remains. It is a sore spot with them, exceedingly tender, and always in the way, sure to be hit when we least think of it, and the slightest touch fills them with pain. The inconvenience of poverty is much more tolerable to them than the idea of being thought poor.

Anything, therefore, which would seem to suggest the dreaded possibility, either directly or indirectly, is feared and avoided, and especially that which might hint that they are in receipt of charity; and as aid is given at the chapel during the week, and sometimes to some who do worship there on Sunday, it is very naturally found that all who attend there may be thought to belong to this class, and because it does happen that there are those who follow for "the loaves and fishes," they too are there for that purpose. And so they quietly stay away. Illustrating this, a story is told in the paper already referred to, of a woman, who remarked to a certain clergyman, that she went to his church "last night." "Did you?" said he, "I am glad to hear it." "Yes," said she, "but I will never go again." "How so?" he inquired. "Why," she returned, "I saw bread being given away after service, and I cannot be suspected of that sort of thing." And it is not only those who are not in receipt of

"bread" who stay away lest they should "be suspected of that sort of thing," but those who do receive help, that the fact may not be suspected. Thus unwittingly, the Ministry-at-Large has practically closed its doors largely to those it was designed to benefit. It has so constituted itself as to make it require no little moral courage to brave public opinion so far as to accept its provisions and join in its worship. For public opinion is stronger than statutes, and shall we say stronger, also, than religion? The English have a phrase like this: "He, or she, is calling me," which being translated means "He is calling me by derisive or offensive names," which is exceedingly distasteful and even exasperating to them. And they are not alone in this. The old prophet who was annoyed by the gamins of his day calling him "baldhead," is said to have let loose two she-bears, which destroyed forty-two of them. Such is the term "turncoat," as applied to those who change their religious faith, or heretic, or infidel, or abolitionist, as used in times past. They are epithets of terror armed and barbed with social ostracism. Thus, a father, whose children by a Scotch wife were attending a Protestant Church and Sunday School, threatened that unless they left, he would "call them" in the mill where they worked, and the operatives taking it up would make it impossible for them to remain in their situation. So there was a time—and we know not if it be continued—when the children of our Sunday School were called after as they passed in the street, "Free Chapel! Free Chapel!" There is, of course, nothing

offensive in this phrase to us who honor the Free Chapel, but it was intended as odium and felt as such by those to whom it was applied. So there is nothing bad in the word "baldhead," but the prophet made it bad for the children.

We have used our best endeavors to counteract and overcome this unfortunate sentiment, but have found it exceedingly difficult. Our work of relief has been separated as far as possible from our religious ministrations and we have been emphatic in our declaration that religion is not made a condition of charity. Morality is, but not religion. We inquire about the religion and nationality, not as conditions of relief, but as a matter of record. It is distinctly understood that charity is no part of our religious worship, that the reward of the latter is not in "meat and drink," but in the privilege of doing good to those who most need it. Yet charity, not in its noble sense, but in its odious transformation, seems to be written over our door to warn off those who would otherwise enter. And, if we mistake not, sometime, these chapels themselves have rather contributed to this sentiment than otherwise in their neglected poverty-stricken appearance; for walls are vocal, pews have a language, and stairways lead downward as well as upward. This may be quite unavoidable, but it tends all the same to neutralize the efforts and defeat the real object of the Society.

A DEGREE OF SUCCESS.

Nevertheless, though the Ministry-at-Large has not attained that success which it was hoped it might, by Dr. Tuckerman and others, it has not been a failure. It has done much noble work, especially through its Sunday schools. In its charity it goes out into hundreds of homes and saves the unfortunate from hunger and suffering. But in its Sunday School it finds its way to the affections of hundreds of children and awakens in their heart new life, new aspirations, new endeavors, and saves them very often from the downward course of sin and moral ruin. This is indeed our best work, and as we look back over it sometimes, it affords great satisfaction, though the way we have come has been hard and the obstacles to overcome have been many. Said one of an interesting class to her teacher, with a bright, beaming countenance, "Your girls have done pretty well, haven't they?" when they were grown and nearly all married. And it was so, and but for the interest and watchful care of that teacher it is hard to tell what would have been their future. Very few who have come among us and remained, have done any other than well. To the interest and importance of this Sunday School work, we think all our teachers will testify, as by their own interest and self-sacrificing labor they have shown how deeply their sympathies and regard have become enlisted. Connected with our Sunday School at present is a very fine class of young men and women—many of whom are also members of our church, eager to learn and ready to work, only a limited

number of whom have ever been in receipt of pecuniary aid. And in fact, at the present time, only a limited number of the entire school are, or have been in receipt of charity.

For there are those,—not many indeed, but a very respectable few,—made of sterner stuff, who do not care for the small flings of smaller people, persons who are self-sustaining but not rich, who gratefully avail themselves of a place of worship free to all. They are not rich, and conscious that it is by no fault of their own, they do not care who knows it, and are not going to make themselves and others unhappy on account of it, nor deprive themselves of any privileges offered to the poor, from any unwarranted or undue sensitiveness. They accept their situation manfully, determined to make the best of it, and get all the sunshine out of life they can. Like the apostle “they have learned in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content.” And there are those too, who, having received help in the time of need, do not soon forget it, and out of gratitude as well as from choice throw their lot in with us and continue to work with us to a common end. Such are helpers, “right and left hand supporters,” on which we rely for much valuable assistance, and are seldom disappointed. Not among those who follow for the “loaves and fishes,” they remain when the loaves and fishes cease to be multiplied.

And notwithstanding all these hindrances which lie in our way, we think we are making some little progress in the right direction. It is slow, indeed, but

we think we note some advancement. Those who have made the Chapel their religious home, are becoming more and more self-reliant, active, and efficient in their society capacity. They assume duties and perform services formerly devolving upon the friends outside of the Ministry. The New Year's dinner, for example, formerly contributed by others—then held on Christmas evening—is now provided wholly by themselves and in a manner creditable to any society; and the Temperance society has fitted up and carpeted its hall at its own expense, while in several instances within a few months contributions have been taken up for the sick, resulting in considerable sums. On one evening, and without previous notice, nearly twenty dollars were thus realized.

We are confident that much more might be done in this direction if we could give our whole time to the work, and our efforts were not hindered or neutralized by what some one has called "the smudge of charity." It is to be regretted that these two branches of Christian work could not be carried on separately. Not that they are necessarily incompatible, but that that which ministers to our temporal necessities alone is so liable to degenerate into gross selfishness, that it is almost sure to taint and enfeeble the administration of the spirit. But as this cannot be at present, we must content ourselves to do the best we can with the appliances at hand.

In conclusion we desire to express our thanks to all who have aided us, both by their labors in connection with our Chapel service, and in their contributions to the necessities of the poor.

Respectfully submitted,

H. C. DUGANNE.

LOWELL, Dec. 31, 1879.

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Respectfully submitted,

H. C. DUONG

